

### Cultural practices of the reception and appropriation of films from the standpoint of a praxeological sociology of knowledge

Geimer, Alexander

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# Cultural Practices of the Reception and Appropriation of Films from the Standpoint of a Praxeological Sociology of Knowledge

## 1 Film Analysis and the Analysis of the Reception and Appropriation of Films

Due to the disregard of the visual quality of the social reality (resulting from the methodological textual focus since the so-called linguistic turn, see Bohnsack, 2008a: 155ff., 2007), the qualitative analysis of films in the social sciences has no particular tradition. However, the preoccupation with films has a long history in media and film studies, which developed in the course of a wide differentiation with several theoretical positions being tied to grand theories such as psychoanalysis, semiotics, marxism, post-structuralism, and cognitive psychology. Sociological research questions are barely related to these approaches. For from a sociological point of view, such professional readings of films are of the same value and as ‘true’ and ‘correct’ as everyday and lay readings of any other member of a given society. Just as lay film readings, professionals’ readings are ridden with prerequisites: film theories premise in different ways an ideal or implicit viewer who is influenced by the aesthetic principles the theory is able to detect in a film. That is, behind every construction of a film stands the construction of an audience.

Even though film theorists have criticized this practice, it still dominates scientific work. Among all film theorists, it is especially Janet Staiger who questions this procedure of focusing aesthetical structures by premising an ideal or implicit recipient. She states that the audience and its context of reception and appropriation of films have to be considered in detail: “This context most certainly includes the sense data of the film, but it also includes the interpretative strategies used by a spectator. These strategies are influenced by, among other things, aesthetic preferences and practices, knowledge and expectations prior to attending to the movie images, and experiences in the exhibition situation” (Staiger, 2000: 30f.).

Based on the relativization of the difference between professional and lay film readings and the assumption that various influencing factors on film readings exist, we come to a crucial conclusion concerning a sociological grasp of films: We should not be interested in deciding on one objective film reading that gives us any information about the general influence of a film on recipients but in reconstructing concrete different film readings in our em-

pirical work. Therefore we need a methodological framework and corresponding methods which allow the reconstructing of viewers' experiences. The most prominent and in many actual studies considered approach is provided by Cultural Studies.

## **2 The Difficulty with the Concept of Film and Media Appropriation in Cultural Studies**

Even though, Cultural Studies are an enormous heterogeneous project, some dominant strategies in the occupation with films and media in general can be identified. Cultural Studies developed two lines of traditions in analysing films and media products and their reception respectively appropriation (see Fiske, 1992): *discourse analysis* of the media product and *ethnographic analysis* of the everyday use of media products. While the analysis of the potential meaning is the main subject of the discourse analytic tradition, it is the aim of the audience research to describe the concrete contact of people with a media product and their "social use" of it (Keppler, 2001, see also Morley/Silverstone, 1993). The discourse analysis of media products concentrates on the revealing of ideological structures (e.g. concerning race, gender, class) which are dominating the representation of social realities in films. But the ideological framing of media products does not determine their reception, so Cultural Studies also conduct „the examination of how interacting individuals connect their lives to these ideological texts and make sense of their experiences in terms of the texts' meanings“ (Denzin, 1992: 82)<sup>1</sup>. The methods used in audience research of Cultural Studies mostly trace back to qualitative and especially ethnographical works and the interpretative paradigm (Wilson, 1970) in sociology. Nowadays, there is a broad consensus that a "radical contextualism" (Ang, 1996a; see also Grossberg, 1994) that focuses mainly on the local, situational and interactional social use of media products (during the concrete reception process as well as afterwards) is the best solution. Recently, this approach received great attention. In Germany, nearly every qualitative work on audience research refers in any way to this concept of film and media appropriation (– for an overview of actual approaches see Geimer/Ehrenspeck, 2010).

According to the primary occupation with the situational emergence of meaning in interaction and the local doing of social differences, most Cul-

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1 The position of Denzin is not considered in detail here. This is due to premises following from "the cinematization of American society" (Denzin, 1992: 138) which are not shared by all Cultural Studies researchers: "First, reality has become a staged, social production. Second, the real is judged against its staged, cinematic or video counterpart. Third the metaphor of a dramaturgical society [...] has now become an interactional reality" (ebd.).

tural Studies' researchers focus on interpretation strategies and decoding practices of films and other media products which are *not* anchored in habitus formations (in terms of Bourdieu) or conjunctive spaces of experience (in terms of Mannheim) but in general common sense discourse and the contextual varying work of self-presentation and the doing of social differences. In fact, many cultural researchers cast doubt on the existence of stable structures of experiences. Moreover, Fiske states that cultural postmodernism leads to an enormous social diversity which implies that concepts of stable 'social groups' or 'social categories' are less appropriate than a concept of social formations that are consistently altering and rearranging and whose members are changing. Then media products provide symbolic material for the constant construction of contextual varying differences. In this struggle for meaning, only local consensus can be achieved in negotiation processes, for a broad consensus including the altering formations cannot be accomplished (any longer). Bohnsack has already – regarding the interpretative paradigm in sociology – criticized such a view on the social construction of reality concerning 'consensus construction': "The process character of interactions and conversations was reduced to the single aspect of local and situational negotiation, that is, to the emergence of meanings" (Bohnsack, 2004: 215).

In fact, many Cultural Studies' theorists may, in a post-structuralistic and anti-essentialistic manner, question any underlying dimension of knowledge being represented (and reproduced) in social action and refer to the ongoing accomplishment of social reality in cultural performances (in terms of e.g. Fiske or post-structuralistic theorists such as Butler, 1990). Such methodological premises must lead to methodical problems concerning the reconstruction of fundamental structures of experience in everyday practice: "The empirical procedures for the analysis of [...] deeper meaning patterns have only been approximately worked out in the methodology of Cultural Studies" (Bohnsack, 2004: 216).

Nevertheless, to observe media products as discourse collages which are selectively used by recipients making their own fabrications depending on the availability of common sense knowledge structures and their everyday activities is an important concern – but it's less about 'appropriation' as we like to conceptualize it. Instead, it shows how films (and other media products) are interpreted related to their use in different social settings in order to accomplish and arrange (that is to reproduce or modify) these settings. To put it in Garfinkel's (1967) words, it is about the production of *accountability* by means of media products / films. In order to obtain another grasp of appropriation one needs a methodological vocabulary and methodical instruments that are less connected with the interpretative paradigm and post-structuralism in the social sciences to which Cultural Studies' researchers often refer.

### 3 A Concept of Appropriation from the Standpoint of the Praxeological Sociology of Knowledge

The current social sciences do not solely offer the sociology of knowledge according to the interpretative paradigm (e.g. Berger/Luckmann, 1969) but also the works of Karl Mannheim (1952, 1982) and their advancement in the praxeological sociology of knowledge and the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2008a). This allows the reconstruction of conjunctive spaces of experience and therein registered generative principles of the construction of everyday practice (orientation patterns) which are not merely depending on negotiation processes in everyday interaction. In conjunctive spaces of experience an explicit construction of social differences and similarities is not just unnecessary but impossible because the collective shared knowledge is taken for granted and, therefore, remains implicit. Polanyi also discussed this kind of knowledge – as a tacit knowledge that is known by people without being able to explain it (Polanyi, 1966). The knowledge established by conjunctive spaces of experience is atheoretical and often represented in metaphors; it comprises orientation patterns, which guide the practice of everyday life and embedded media reception processes. Accordingly, also Bohnsack notes: “Depending on the history of socialization the overlay of different conjunctive spaces of experience leads to different *reception modes*” (Bohnsack, 2008b). Against the background of these main ideas of the praxeological sociology of knowledge, a concept of appropriation of films (and other media products) can be proposed: appropriation requires a specific connectivity between films (or other media products) and a conjunctive space of experience. As Cultural Studies conceptualize the medium-reception-interaction (Winter, 2003: 156ff.; Denzin, 1992: 82ff.) inspired by the interpretative paradigm (e.g. ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism) and partly by post-structuralism (Fiske, 1987, 1996) this dimension of film (and media) appropriation cannot be grasped.

In light of this, it is no surprise that most of the media research in cultural studies concerning media appropriation deals with the *communicative* appropriation of *TV series*, *TV shows* or *‘cult movies’*. These programmes are usually received by an intensely “talking recipient” (Holly/Püschel/Bergmann, 2001) often being an aficionado or being situated in so-called fan cultures, whose members chat and quarrel not only about the content and characters but more detailed media knowledge. In this case, common sense knowledge concerning production, distribution and reception (filmography and the biography of stars, untold background stories and unseen history of characters, filming techniques and special effects, knowledge about critiques and so on) becomes of conjunctive meaning for the members of fan cultures or aficionados. Thus, the Cultural Studies' approach is in a position to pro-

duce insightful findings about medium-recipient-interactions, especially regarding fan cultures/reception of cult movies as well as in general concerning the social use of films/media products (and its ideological implications). But appropriation in the sense of an interaction between fundamental knowledge structures and a film requires the consideration of a perspective that goes far beyond a “radical contextualism” (Ang, 1996; see also Grossberg, 1994) focusing mainly on the local, interactional use of media products. This is possible by recourse to the works of Mannheim and the praxeological sociology of knowledge, which allows the reconstruction of conjunctive spaces of experience and therein registered generative principles of the construction of everyday practice.

In the following, I present empirical findings from an analysis of interviews with fourteen young people (from Berlin, aged between 18 and 22) about their occupation with films.<sup>2</sup> The outcomes show two different reception modes. On the one hand films can be used as a *resource for group interaction and the performance of social relationships* – which has been observed by Cultural Studies very well. On the other, films can be used as *resource for world experience* which implies a certain connectivity between the social practice shown in a film and the everyday life practice of the audience which has not been observed exhaustively until now.

## 4 Two Fundamental Modes of the Reception of Films

### 4.1 *Films as a Resource for Group Interaction and Social Relationships*

Films are part of young people’s everyday leisure time and whenever this is picked out as a central theme it suggests itself as an opportunity to talk about films. In contrast to many other leisure activities one doesn’t need to share the viewing of a film in order to talk about it. Thus, knowledge about films is suitable in a special manner for starting and supporting conversations, e.g. during “small talk” at the work place. In these everyday situations a “cascade

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<sup>2</sup> 6 are male and 8 are female. 10 have the German high school diploma (4 are doing an apprenticeship, 6 are studying), one young man is in his last high school year, one has a CSE (and is unemployed) and two females have a secondary school diploma and are working as a masseuse resp. office clerk. The parents of one juvenile are not German and come from Iran. The interviews were raised in the project „Kommunikatbildungsprozesse Jugendlicher zur Todesthematik und filmische Instruktionsmuster“ (see Geimer/Lepa/Hackenberg/ Ehrenspeck, 2007) which was founded by the German research foundation (DFG). For this project was mainly following a quantitative approach, the outcomes of both studies are not compared.

of reception acts” (see Krotz, 2001: 87f.) follows the prior and concrete reception process:

If you stand together somehow and smoke a cigarette or something and first you talk about the weekend or so and then, well oh yes, I’ve watched a great movie at the weekend. And then, of course, you ask the others if they have watched it also or maybe have heard of it, and then you can easily start a conversation. (Lara, 18)

Thereby, knowledge about films supports the continuity of talk especially when one is not familiar with one’s counterpart:

Well, somehow I like talking about films, especially if you are not very acquainted with someone and /er/ need something to talk about. (Eva, 19)

These quotes demonstrate the “catalytic” function of film knowledge in social situations. Being a theme easily implemented in the course of interaction, film knowledge helps to fill gaps or to start or respectively to maintain conversations. Furthermore, the communication about films can become so important that one watches certain films merely in order to share the knowledge with others. On this note, another interviewee stated that she watches brutal horror films (“slaughter films” in her terms) in order to join in conversations about them:

But, I watch them, too, because everybody watches them (laughs), because you can talk about them then... (Claudia, 21)

The opportunity to talk about films supports not just the flow of conversations, it also operates as a distinguishing mark, which is used to include or exclude persons as (non-)members of peer groups. This communicative function of film knowledge is documented in the following utterances, which reveal that films are cited in order to create a sense of cohesiveness:

Just retelling the jokes, on special scenes, and then people laugh about it the whole evening. Or days later. Well there’s a lot of stuff, especially out of comedies, which are kind of an insider joke also, about which we talk in school or so, and then, just a word, and everybody starts laughing, ‘cause he knows exactly what was meant in this situation. (Katja, 22)

According to that social function of film reception and film knowledge, many young people watch special kinds of films with special people (friends, partner, family). That is, films and knowledge about films can be used to manage social relationships. Or as a young man puts it:

If you invite somebody for cinema then the film which you choose gives evidence for your personality... (Mevlüt, 21)

For this reason the cited young man Mevlüt would neither watch “Terminator” nor any other “action stuff” with a girl, and vice versa would not watch “harmonious” and “sentimental” films with his male friends. Thus, films are chosen in the light of the anticipated reaction of a counterpart. That is, films

are chosen in order to establish (or 'do') differences and manage the impression of oneself and presentation of self in everyday life. There are almost no young people who do *not* exhibit such a social use of films. Many other remarks show that often a film is completely absorbed in the social situation in which the reception takes place. In that way, a film becomes an accessory part of social sceneries. Unlike other reception practices, talk during reception is not forbidden but desired. According to this, a girl quotes that in "film nights" together with her girl friends they prepare pizzas during the films and chat a lot, not merely about the film (contrary to the reception of other films with her family). Asked what they talked about during the reception in these "film nights" she answers:

Well, sometimes something crosses ones mind, which crosses ones mind and doesn't belong to the film, or something in the film catches someone's eye. (Claudia, 21)

The quotation shows that any theme "which crosses ones mind" – independent of its association with the film – can structure the interaction during reception. Quite similar to this, another young man classifies watching films in cinema mainly as a "social event":

Well, actually in the cinema it is, cinema for me is rather such a matter where you meet with friends and /er- well - er/ if anything a social event. Where you meet with friends. Go out. And cinema is a part of it, I think. [...]

It's rarely the case that /er/ I visit a cinema because of a film. I go there if, really, I don't know if peer pressure plays a role, or not, but in any case, when, at that time in school it was like, when, when everybody was talking about a movie which was supposed to be pretty cool then you watched it in any case. (Mevlüt, 21)

Both quotations show that the social activity is the primary focus of action. The film and its story, actors or quality and so forth seem to be less relevant, almost irrelevant. There are other interviewees who state also that they have no especial interest in choosing certain movies when going to the cinema – sequentially appearing to them merely as "meeting friends". Often later on, the choice of a certain film emerges "not as great, but that's ok". In this reception mode, even a bad film may provide good reasons for conversation. For example, some friends have seen a preview of a film during a cinema visit, which appeared to them as "pretty bad", and on this account they decided to watch it at the next opportunity. In fact, the reception, which took place later turned out according to their prior evaluation:

One of the worst or even the worst film (laughing) I've ever seen. And partly we have watched such bad films, of which we knew: ok, this one will be bad. And then, a friend and I smuggled a bottle of apple liquor into the cinema and we killed time with that, umm, well. (Steff, 20)



The interviewee answered the subsequent question of the ungratified interviewer as to why he watches films of which he knows that they're bad that it's not just about "killing time" but a "destructive lust"...

Well, I can't tell where this may be traced back to. Maybe, it's just like a destructive lust to do something completely absurd or to make fun of a film ... sometimes we have... Well, we have a ... a friend came up with a power film from Spain, called school killers...well, this one was just bad too, and then we tried to find out the inner logic which doesn't exist, that's pretty interesting, even if the film is bloody awful. (Steff, 20)

The strength of the "power film" stems not from the film, which lacks inner "logic", but from the collective reception and talking about the film in which the lacking logic is produced together in a social event being often celebrated by consuming drugs. This activity may be interpreted as a kind of 'appropriation' on which Cultural Studies primarily concentrate. The young people channel the film into their own fabrication that undermines the aesthetical (and potentially ideological) structures of a film.

Besides this reception mode, another one was reconstructed in which the film does not mainly appear as a resource of social interaction but of world experience. Then films are not solely integrated into everyday practice but the practice displayed in films is related to one's own everyday practice.

#### *4.2 Films as a Resource for World Experience*

We start with a maximum contrast to the reception mode in which films appear as a resource for the performance of group interaction and social relationships: a young man (Lars, 20) quotes that he dislikes any disturbances while watching a film, this includes talking to others. He points out how important it is for him to "really concentrate just on the film". This concentration is not given up even if he receives visitors while watching a film. Then it is up to them to decide whether they want to watch the film also or leave again. These priorities also appear when he describes cinema visits with his family. If they choose a film he disliked, he simply watched another one at the same time and they met again afterwards. Additionally this orientation is reproduced in the organization of film nights, in which he watches up to four movies with various friends while having nearly no conversation during the reception as well as afterwards. Many other young people report quite similar circumstances of film reception – one put the condition he desires to establish by setting it in words as follows: "Sort of immersion in a world or however described" (David, 19).

Of course, this "immersion" can take place in a way that the later occupation with the film is framed by the interactional reception mode reconstructed above. But there is also another reception mode in which the young people have strictly different experiences that are, for some of them, very

hard to describe – as is the case in the remarks below following the question as to whether the interviewee Maria could name a film that impressed her:

Maria, 21: 'Perfect World' /er/ with /er/ Kevin Coster.

I: That's the one he kidnaps this guy, isn't it?

M: /er/ Exactly.

I: This one intensely impressed you? Why that?

M: I don't know it!

I: ((laughs))

M.: I suppose, I've, watched it umpteen times, twenty times? I have no idea...

I: Thaaat much?

M: Yes, and every time the same feelings /er/

I: Which kind of feelings?

M: Probably, 'cause you have ... get some kind of mercy or relatedness to Kevin Coster in his role which he plays somehow /er/ And the son ... the little boy, he has no father, and then the relationship which they establish, and there is Kevin Coster ... he wants to meet his own father again and (takes a deep breath) I don't know, that's so ... And then the music. They have some, I suppose, Scottish music.

Maria has enormous problems in describing what caused the feeling that led to her watching this film about twenty times. Not until the interviewer's second question, she tries to explain more precisely and then refers to some plot parts of which she finally can't tell why they impressed her in any way ("I don't know, that's so..."). She then attributes her emotions especially to the (Scottish) music. The special kind of relation to the film (and the practice a film exhibits) that she tries so desperately to describe that she refers to the music instead of formulating an adequate closing of the plot's impact on her. Other young people reject the verbalization of their film experience, at least immediately after reception and partly completely:

I dislike talking about films, when I, when I just watched them. My mother always comments about it. I need some time, well 'cause either I am that captivated that I want to maintain this spellbound feeling or to keep hold of it, so that I don't want to flog them to death. Often, I think, you can't talk about some things anyway, because they already tell their own tale. (Arnia, 20)

As films tell their "own tale", putting them in one's own words means to alienate one from the experience they made possible. In another section of the same interview she reveals that the "own tale" which the film tells has a special impact on her when the plot is somehow congruent to her own experiences:

I think, films, certain themes can address you depending on your personal condition. I think, when my boyfriend left me or I left him, and then somehow a small sequence of a film alludes to that, or I recognize something, then it is appealing me in a very special way. Or if some stuff stemming from my background is rolled up, or parallels exist. (Arnia, 20)

Other young people also refer to such "parallels" between the practice exhibited in a film and their own biography and everyday practice. The following

young man manages to articulate in a long narration / description what kind of impressing parallels to his own experience he found in the film *MILLION DOLLAR HOTEL* (2000).

This one's playing in a scum asylum in San Francisco and the whole look of the film is totally filthy and I love that, if, just as in real life, you know? /er/ the hood I am living, you know, an "in" area, you know, everything filthy, but one has to take a close look, you know, and in this film it's just like that, it's provoked, so you have to take a close look to like the film... (Lars, 20)

It is the parallel between the intense look one has to take at the film and its scenery as well as at the social environment of the interviewee in order to realize, in both cases, the beauty of both. The hood and "in" area is somehow similar to the scum asylum in the film. Both share a hidden beauty, which cannot be revealed by everybody and is accessible to nobody at first sight. On this note, the interviewee describes – after the extract above – the "beautiful" and at the same time "broken-down" main actress of the film (Milla Jovovich). While the selected short passage already displays the close connection between the practice exhibited in the film and the everyday practice of the interviewee, in his further narration he carries this connection to the extreme as he extricates some sort of quintessence out of the plot, or in his own words "metaphors" helping him to cope with certain recurrent problems and situations in everyday life as well as philosophical questions. By means of the *MILLION DOLLAR HOTEL* he comes to the following conclusion:

If people are outstanding /er-er/ educated or not, you know, everybody can be happy, everybody, and if it's a 'dossier' or worst scum for my sake... (Lars, 20)

The primary reception mode comprises no social use of a film in any interactional sense (presentation of self or doing of differences or performing of relationships). Instead, it is about the fabricating of a connectivity between one's own space of experience and the one shown in the film. Additionally, these parallels are used to build and stabilize "metaphors" guiding the answer to philosophical questions as well as everyday life decisions, which is documented in many parts of the interview, such as the following:

There are films, where you keep something in mind, for life. So, where you pick up certain metaphors, in which you recognize yourself or recognize anything at all and realize that's the way it is, and that's what I like the most. (Lars, 20)

It is to highlight, that in such a reception mode, the juveniles make no social use of films in the sense of referring to them for the various interactional purposes of the local, situational process of meaning making and local management of impressions. In fact, it is about the intense experience of a film and the production of a relation to oneself ("pick up certain metaphors, in

which you recognize yourself”).<sup>3</sup> In a quite analogous but more concrete way, films help another interviewee to cope with special problems resulting from her last partnership – Katja imagines getting by with her biography just as the characters in the film, they “made it too”.

Katja, 22: These are all films in which the women were happily in love, but then the man emerged as a tyrant and they tried everything to get away from him...

I: And this was not possible. Or was really hard...

K.: Yes, he really did to her, then he wanted to kill her and everything and /er/ she wasn't allowed to tell a single word about it, was deported from her family and everything. And, so, I've undergone the same...

I: Oh, I see...

K: And because of this, watching such things affects me or partly I know the ones in the film made it too.

As the interviewee watches, with her family, films showing such problems in a partnership which she also suffered once and which she could not communicate to her family at that time, dramas like *ENOUGH* (2002) or *SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY* (1991) being the central theme in this extract support the coping of her trauma: the oppression in the partnership and the forced distance to her family. In light of that it is no surprise that 67% of 827 asked American psychoanalysts stated to work with films in their therapies (see Norcross et al., 2003). It is this practice of using a film as a resource for world experience that we call appropriation.<sup>4</sup> Later on in the course of the reconstruction of specific reception practices by means of the analysis of written narratives, we will learn that such appropriations occur in particular circumstances and that other fabrications of a connectivity between a filmic representation of a social practice and everyday life practice also exist.

But not every young person knows a form of such a connectivity that often produces intense emotions. That is, not every young person is able to connect his or her own space of experience to the one displayed on the screen. In fact, we talked with young people who are missing such an intense experience:

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3 Or elsewhere in the same interview with Lars (20): *As I said, some films are that extraordinary good that /er/ that I recognize myself. Yes. That's it, simple like that, yes metaphors, like /er/ no idea, "besser arm dran als Arm ab" [German saying that means in a very indefinite manner that a bad situation is not that bad like "Could be worse - could be raining" or "Every cloud has a silver lining"]. Ways separate in life. Well, sayings you remember.*

4 To give some more examples for this reception mode: A young woman (Arnia, 20) changes her view on Polish refugees by taking over their role for the first time while watching a film and thereby gains new access to the neighbouring country. Another girl highlights her insight in strange spaces of experiences (of drug addicts and couriers), which are usually solely reflected in some statistical numbers and stresses the influence of this insight on her occupational orientations.

Well, intense emotions? No, but I always wished that it would happen, but it never happened. A film with which I was occupied for a long time /er/ in order to understand it one day and /er/ but that was not in any emotional manner, it was just /er/ it was the first movie made by David Lynch I've watched and /er/ haven't seen anything comparable and /er/ was merely interested in what's lying beneath that or if these moments of violence are just senseless ("). But emotional? (Karl, 21)

The interviewee desired to be touched emotionally by a film, but that "never happened". This can be traced back to his more rational frame of orientation which is shaped by common sense knowledge and not conjunctive knowledge stocks. As he watches films in the light of such interpretational schemes as "what's lying beneath" and focuses on the (re)construction of the intentions of an 'author' of a film, it is very unlikely that the missing emotionality will occur. Likewise, we found more young people being unable to relate films to their own experience. Asked about any relation between everyday life and the social practice exhibited in films Mevlüt stated:

Mevlüt, 21: Well, I've got a mate being really familiar with films and /er/ with the actors and all that stuff, that is, some films he really knows inside out and often the film music too.

I: Yes.

M: Sometimes, that's funny. He starts humming the film music before it appears in the film.

*(both are laughing)*

M: But, but, no /er/ Me, I'm lacking the according knowledge.

I: OK

M: Well, neither do I know very much about all the actors nor I know anything about brand new gossip...

The interviewee refers in his answer to the common sense knowledge of a friend about films. He could not display in a more precise manner that he is not interested in gaining access to the social practice films exhibit. First, he does not refer to his own knowledge. And second, the knowledge he refers to is of a surprisingly impersonal nature regarding the question. So his answer to the question as to whether he uses films as a resource for world experience shows that he primarily knows films as a resource for interactional purposes such as the performance of group interaction and social relationships. Later on, he elaborates this reception mode more precisely. While there are some cases consistently preferring one of the two reception modes, actually most young people know both. *That is, the results basically cannot be interpreted as a typology of persons but one of practices that are rarely bound to concrete people.* A young woman (Claudia, 21), especially, proves the possibility of the changing of reception modes. On the one hand, she seeks the intense experience of dramas together with her family to cope with her last partnership. On the other hand, she watches comedies with her girl friends while preparing pizzas and the group practices constituting talk about films in which film knowledge is used to identify members.

## 5 Empirical Findings of an Analysis of Young Persons' Written Narratives of the Film THE OTHERS

The analysis of the written re-narrations was conducted in order to validate the reception mode in which a film appears as a resource of world experience and which from the standpoint of the praxeological sociology of knowledge can be termed appropriation (in special circumstances as we see in this chapter). For this reception mode implies the viewing of a certain film; it is inevitable to collect data that gives an account of concrete reception processes. Written narratives seem to be appropriate for this purpose and exist for every one of the interviewed young people. They watched the film THE OTHERS (2001) and immediately afterwards wrote their narratives. Again, the analysis was conducted by means of the documentary method. In the following, the outcomes are discussed on a more abstract level than the two reception modes in the last chapter. This means that – due to the shortage of space – I will merely introduce a typology of reception practices without sourcing them by extracts from the narratives.

The analysis of the fourteen narratives leads to four reception practices which we termed: *reproductive respectively productive appropriation, conjunctive distinction, aesthetic formalization, and polysemous interpretation*. The first practice corresponds to the reception mode using films as a resource for world experience reconstructed in the interview analysis. It implies an interaction between the social practice exhibited in a film and young people's everyday life practice. We were able to differentiate between two modes. A *reproductive appropriation* takes place if conjunctive knowledge is connectable to a filmic representation, but the structure of knowledge itself does not change. The young people focus on such filmic structures (persons, relations, circumstances, environments and so forth), which 'are related' to their space of experience, more precisely: they construct some kind of relationship. For example, an interviewee concentrates on the history of her disease to understand the situation of a character, or another one empathizes with a character and her problem of losing an important person in the light of her own loss. This reception practice leads to the reproduction of conjunctive structures of experiences. A substantial variety of this we called *productive appropriation*. Thereby, the film functions less as a 'mirror' reflecting one's own experiences but it influences and changes the structure of deposited experiences (tacit knowledge / conjunctive knowledge) – as it occurs in the following case: a young man described in his narrative serious confusions concerning his identity and was able to project them onto the film characters and, at the same time, could also carry with him sedative aspects concerning coping with his problems. In an analogous manner, Schäffer examined a "trans-conjunctive dimension in terms of anciently conjunctive knowledge, that is

knowledge stocks concerning milieus, biographies, and above all style and habitus of other generations” (Schäffer, 1998: 35f.).

*Reproductive* as well as *productive appropriation* similarly feature the connectivity between conjunctive knowledge structures (depending on various spaces of experience) and the aesthetic structure of a film. That is, the practice staged in a film is connectable to the everyday life practice. This is not the case concerning the reception practice of *conjunctive distinction*. Along the lines of *reproductive and productive appropriation*, young people operate with conjunctive knowledge stocks, but the film functions as a negative horizon and experiences can be verbalized against the background of the film, but stand in vivid contrast to it.

		Connectivity between knowledge stocks and film	
		not connectable	connectable
Forms of knowledge	communicative knowledge	polysemous interpretation	aesthetic formalization
	conjunctive knowledge	conjunctive distinction	reproductive / productive appropriation

Figure 1: Typology of Reception Practices

In contrast to the reception practices reconstructed so far, a polysemous interpretation implies a primary use of common sense knowledge, which is not exclusively connectable to a film. That is, there are too many discourses available in which a film can be decoded and the interpretation varies with every discourse a young person chooses. In doing so, there is no single film reading detectable and no definite meaning constructible, rather young people bring out the polysemy by the constant use of different stocks of common sense knowledge. The young people cannot determine which film reading (and which knowledge stock) is the “right” or “true” or “better” one. For example, a girl successively interprets the film as a critique of religiousness, critique of knowledge, propagating of an afterlife, capitalistic product of media industry.

Reducing such a polysemy or avoiding its emergence by constructing a certain film reading is provided by the communicative knowledge about the authors’ intentions and their ways of encoding films and distributing messages (*aesthetical formalization*). For this purpose of ‘message construction’,

young people often refer to the principles of film making in general or to laws of various genres or directors' handwritings and to other things potentially controlling influences on the audience. A variety of this reception practice being less but also bound on the (re)construction of an aesthetic structure is the taking over of explicit ideological standpoints of interpretation. This means, that in the eyes of a young person a film is of a special kind because it shows some ideological relevant problems in a certain way (such as unemployment in a given society, the gender relations in a given culture, and so forth). This "showing" must be related to some aesthetic structures, but does not need to be elaborated precisely. In addition, it is possible that young people describe the aesthetic structure of a film without constructing authors' intentions and refer to their own perception instead (such as the emergence of fear, pity, anger instructed by music, light, plot, acting skills and so forth).

## 6 Conclusion

The interview analysis allowed reconstructing two fundamental different reception modes concerning general occupation with films. Used as a resource for social interaction, films support the situational making of differences in interaction and the local 'doing' of social categories such as gender and (peer) group membership. In this way of using films as a resource for the performance of group interaction and social relationships the practice exhibited in the film is of less relevance. In contrast, it becomes a main interest when films are used as a resource for world experience. Then the focus of juveniles lies on the connectivity of the practice shown in a film to one's own everyday life practice. While the interactional reception mode is well observed by Cultural Studies, due to methodological and methodical reasons (see chapter 2), the reception practice of using films as resource for world experience is rarely observed. Thus, this paper especially concentrated on the production of connectivity between the social practice exhibited in a film and everyday life practice. From the standpoint of a praxeological sociology of knowledge this is the determining level on which appropriation processes can take place. The analysis of written narratives allowed validating and specifying this reception mode pattern as a practice of *reproductive* or *productive appropriation*. Thereby, a typology was reconstructed in which this practice was classified amongst other ones. Since these are not connected to conjunctive spaces of experience, they were not detectable by means of the interview analysis. The young people did not talk about them because the interview did not comprise the reception of a specific film but the young people's occupation with films in general. Notwithstanding, the practice of producing an



intense connectivity between oneself and films (*re/productive appropriation*) is so important for many young people that they also expressed it in the interviews. On this issue, especially, further research is needed for concepts concerning any 'impact' of films on young people are related to it. This concerns discourses about the formation of orientations by means of film reception such as 'deviant or subversive behaviour and media reception' or '(implicit) learning by media reception' or even 'curing with media reception'. In short, and generally speaking, whenever it is about the interaction of structures of knowledge and experience with aesthetic structures the praxeological sociology of knowledge and the documentary method provide a challenging methodological frame of reference and useful methodical tools.

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